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SENSITIVE  
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SUBJECT: IS RUSSIA CRACKING OPEN THE DOOR ON OSCE TRAINING  
IN AFGHANISTAN?

¶1. Summary: We could have an opportunity to advance cooperation with Russia through the OSCE in Central Asia and potentially open a crack in Russian opposition to OSCE training inside Afghanistan. In an unusually warm and persistent manner, Russian ambassador Anvar Azimov has requested a U.S. proposal for joint U.S.-Russian training on countering transnational threats to be conducted somewhere in Central Asia, hinting that this might lead to similar training in Kabul. Mission sees this as a potential opportunity to advance US policy goals on "anchoring" Afghanistan in Central Asia and promoting greater regional cooperation through the OSCE on Afghanistan. Action Request: Mission requests guidance on response to the Russian request. End Summary.

¶2. The political dialogue at the OSCE on European Security ("the Corfu Process") could potentially open new areas of cooperation with Russia as part of the "reset." In December, the U.S. and Russia co-sponsored a highly-symbolic Ministerial decision on transnational threats, summarizing much of the Corfu Process discussions on this cross-dimensional topic and calling for enhanced efforts to address these threats, particularly through greater cooperation with OSCE Partner states (including Afghanistan). As a USOSCE initiative, the two delegations in Vienna began discussing shortly afterwards projects that the two countries could promote to implement this decision, with joint training in Central Asia under the auspices of the OSCE as a potential next step.

¶3. The Russian ambassador raised the issue again with the Charge on January 13 and asked for a written proposal for joint training in Central Asia, with his preference being for the OSCE Academy in Bishkek and for the OSCE Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe as a second option. Going further, he asserted that he might be able to use this first step to convince Moscow to change its long-standing opposition to OSCE training inside Afghanistan, with joint training in Kabul as a second step. Asked if he had run the joint training idea past Moscow, Azimov said he had done so informally, but more details are needed. The Charge mentioned that she had also raised the possibility informally in Washington (note: primarily S/SRAP and EUR/RPM). Options for joint training could include counternarcotics, border monitoring, counterterrorism, and travel document security.

¶4. On January 18, on the margins of the Security Committee meeting, a member of the Russian delegation followed up with a specific proposal for counternarcotics training, suggesting the Dushanbe site. Finally, at the opening Corfu Process discussion January 19, Azimov announced to the delegations--without consulting us and with little context--that it is no secret that the United States and Russia are jointly preparing a project to implement the co-sponsored ministerial decision.

15. Considerable spadework will be necessary to identify the right type of project for such joint training. Post intends to work with the OSCE Secretariat to review ongoing training activities and proposed initiatives to identify opportunities for this training. In individual discussions with the OSCE Mission Heads from Central Asia in Vienna last week, we pressed them on the need to actively seek out ways to involve Afghanistan in their efforts, particularly with respect to border management, counterterrorism and counternarcotics. Poloff also met with the Center for Conflict Prevention Borders Unit last week to review their existing and planned activities related to Afghanistan.

16. In another positive move towards greater OSCE involvement in Afghanistan, the Kazakhstani CIO informed us January 19 that they have identified an individual in their Embassy in Kabul who will serve as a focal point for OSCE activities with the Afghan authorities.

17. Comment: An old-school Soviet, Azimov usually opposes any idea put forth by the U.S., so his unusual warmth and insistence on receiving a formal proposal with more details suggests that this is not his personal initiative. Additionally, we and Canada both noted a change in normally tough Russian language on OSCE work in Afghanistan during Azimov's response to Kazakhstani FM Saudabayev at the inaugural PC January 14 where many participating States emphasized the need to provide greater technical assistance to Afghanistan. Whereas in the past Azimov has never missed an opportunity to repeat Russian objections to OSCE training inside Afghanistan, this time, after mentioning training at Domodedovo, he went on to say "but we are open to other

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possibilities."

18. Comment continued: We may be reading too much into this overture, but the Mission believes we should respond positively to this potential opening, while keeping in mind comments from OSCE Secretariat staff and OSCE mission heads in Central Asia, who have told us that training is often hindered by Afghan disorganization and Central Asian governments, reluctance to involve Afghans in activities within their countries. Although we suspect the Russians would like to do joint counternarcotics training and perhaps also promote their interest in holding another visible, but not very productive, counternarcotics conference in Vienna this year, we have the opportunity to drive this in a direction that we believe would be most beneficial for the region and our long-term policy objectives.

19. Action Request: Azimov is expecting a response, at least informally, on whether to expect this idea of joint training to be made concrete. Mission requests guidance from Washington on how to proceed.  
FULLER